Dear Madam,

Call for views on destitution and asylum in Scotland

Thank you for your letter dated 31st January regarding the above.

Please find below a response to the particular questions you have asked:

As a public service provider, what support are you able to provide asylum seekers and what are the main barriers to support.

South Ayrshire Council has successfully supported the Afghan Relocation Scheme and Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme. Both schemes provided financial assistance to the local authority to purchase services and equipment to make the transition to life in Scotland as easy as possible. Both schemes have been resource intensive however, we have a dedicated team who are keen to support the individuals in any way that we can. The greatest challenges to date have been securing employment, training or education opportunities and accessing interpreter services. Although we have no direct experience of managing asylum seekers, the barriers we would likely face relate to pressures on our existing housing stock, as the majority of our stock is in high demand. Private Sector rents in South Ayrshire typically exceed the Broad Rental Market Local Housing Allowance for Ayrshire, making access to the Private Rented Sector more difficult. In those areas where housing demand is lower, there are typically fewer job opportunities.

The most likely barrier to supporting such a group would be access to translator services. From experience with the Syrian VPR Scheme, the cost of translator services significantly exceeded the financial allocation per individual, as demand increased for such services across Scotland. Although a telephone service might be available for asylum seekers, consideration would need to be given as to how this would work in GP surgeries, dentists, pharmacies, Council offices etc and the likely levels of demand placed on local services and a translation line. We have also found that face to face translation typically works better than telephone based services.

As with existing resettlement programmes, I would fully expect continued support from the wider community to those in destitution through the provision of food, furniture and clothing.

We’d also like to hear about how a person’s need for support is assessed and what would make this assessment process easier. Please make reference to any policies and procedures within your organisation.
A person’s need for support would be assessed in line with existing arrangements and in line with legislation to ensure equity in considering their requirements. Services would thereafter be offered based on the determined need of the individual.

If your area does not have experience of asylum seekers, it would be helpful to know what policies, guidance or procedures are in place or being developed to address support for asylum seekers.

Although we have no experience of dealing with failed asylum seekers, South Ayrshire Council has some experience of asylum seekers being placed in the local authority area by the Home Office’s contractor. The local authority input to this process was predominantly a co-ordination role however, higher levels of input were provided by NHS Ayrshire and Arran colleagues. This specifically related to responding to illnesses among the flow of asylum seekers placed within the area.

With regards to policies, guidance or procedures being developed, we continue to remain involved in CoSLA steering groups to consider the local authority’s response. While there remains conflict between Scottish Government objectives through the New Scots Strategy and Immigration laws, we have concerns regarding recourse to public funds. As a local authority, we would have an obligation to assist any person faced with destitution and would apply this in line with existing policies and procedures and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Of immediate concern to us is that a failed asylum seeker would have no recourse to public funds, as detailed in proposed UK law however, in Scotland such a person would be entitled to homeless temporary accommodation. If local authorities across Scotland are to continue their pioneering work in the field of homelessness, consideration needs to be given to how rental obligations and the ability to sustain a life in Scotland will be met.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

David Burns
Head of Housing & Facilities